

The Rhetorical Art of Repetition and Balance

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ABSTRACT

Repetition and balance (parallelism) are essentially foregrounded language heightened for cohesive and rhythmical effects. In this paper, theoretical grounds are discussed from Jakobson's conceptual framework of discourse equivalence to Leech's and Mukarovsky's juxtapositions of foregrounded or highlighted language (see notes).

Extensive samples are cited for close, detailed analysis: from Old English *Beowulf*, Middle English (*Piers Plowman*), Shakespeare's tragedies, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*), Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariener', the late President Kennedy's 'Inaugural Address', and Lacan's analysis on Poe's 'The Purloined Letter.'

Repetition and balance are distinct style markers of aesthetic craftsmanship. Through close analysis, we can gain deep insight into the author's work and style, learn their aesthetic manipulation, and enjoy the excitement of uncovering the semantic density of the text.

Key words: repetition, balance, *Beowulf*, Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, *Lear*

修辭雕塑藝術中的重複與平衡研究

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《摘要》

重複與平衡主要用於彰顯並加強文字凝固結合的力量，以及文字韻律節奏之美。基本理論根據雅克柏森（Jakobson）思想溝通的平衡模式，李奇（Leech）語言的突顯性，及慕卡羅斯考基（Mukarovsky）的語言的正常與非正常的對比。

本文剖析文學作品從古英文的《貝奧武夫》（*Beowulf*），《皮爾斯，農夫》（*Piers Plowman*），莎士比亞悲劇《馬克白》和《李爾王》，斯賓塞的《仙后》，柯律芝的〈老水手之歌〉，及甘迺迪的〈總統就職演說〉，及著名文學理論家拉康（Lacan）的〈失竊的信〉的分析。

重複與平衡為文字彫刻潤飾的最高藝術，深入的研究，可發掘文體風格的奧妙，進而對作品的內涵有更深入的了解，並增加對文字技巧的推敲樂趣。

關鍵詞：重複、平衡、《馬克白》、《李爾王》、《貝奧武夫》。

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Repetition and balance are utilized for cohesive consolidation and rhythmical accentuation in syntagmatic and paradigmatic juxtapositions. The rhetorical devices are based on the principle of equivalence in Jakobson's universe of discourse¹ and Leech's foregrounded regularity². In Mukarovsky and Havranek terms³, they can be viewed as a set of foregrounding or highlighting the linguistic signs against the background of the norms of ordinary language.

Repetition and balance can be broken down into a myriad of meaningfully minute categories: polysyndeton, polyptoton, epistrophe, antimetabole, anadiplosis, anaphora, antistrophe, repetend, symploce⁴, etc. Some familiar terms include synonym, parallelism, antithesis, chiasmus, etc. Phonologically, they can be sub-categorized as alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhymes, meters, etc.

A diachronic or historical study of these rhetorical devices can be traced back to the earliest Anglo-Saxon heroic folk-epic poem *Beowulf*. A prominent feature of the Old English poem is the variation of synonyms. It is my observation that the main reason for this simple device is that the object is set in the limelight and focused on with variegated lights, colors, or perspectives. A glaring example is the description of the monster Grendel. Take the section entitled [The Fight with Grendel] as an example (pp.46-49 in *The Norton Anthology*). Variations of cursed names on Grendel far outnumber those epithets on Beowulf as a preserver and protector. A breakdown of the synonymous appositives is given as follows:

Grendel	Beowulf
their enemy	the prince of goodness
the shadow-stalker	the brave man
the fiend	Hygelac's kinsman (twice)
God-cursed Grendel	Hygelac's trusty retainer
the bane of the race of man	the man
the captain of evil	the Great captain
the devil's (litter)	

the dread of the land
the terror-monger
the loser
the hell-serf
his caller
their demon opponent
the monster's (whole body)

[*Beowulf*, pp.46-49, ll.662-835, Vol. 1 of the *Norton Anthology*]

Grendel is given so many names simply because he is the invader, the ravager, or the perpetrator, or the terrorist who must be hunted down and rooted out. Therefore, a variety of negative epithets are imposed upon him to show that he is such a deadly evil that he deserves his death. It is also significant to note that near the end of the section just mentioned, *Beowulf* and *Grendel* are used instead of synonymous titles.

In Middle English literature. *The Vision of Piers Plowman* by William Langland is studded with alliteration.

Barons and burgesses and bondmen also
I saw in the assemblage, as you shall hear later;
Bakers and brewers and butchers aplenty.
Weavers of wool and weavers of linen,
Tailors, tinkers, tax-collectors in markets,
Masons, miners, many other craftsman (my italics)

[William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ll.217-222.

Trans. E. T. Donaldson (1990)]

The poem begins with 'In a summer season when the sun was mild,' ; down through with 'ditches deep and dark and dreadful to look at,' ; and 'A fair field full of folk I found between them.' We may ask why this poem is honeycombed with alliteration. What are the motif of the poem and the authors purport? For the answer,

we must understand the drift as well as the background of this long religious allegory in alliterative verse.

Piers (or Peter), a plowman, goes through a string of visions. Through the actions of visions, the poet tries to show to us the evils of the 14th-century English society which failed to live up to its Christian principles. To hit his message home and teach us a road for betterment, the author used satirical and vehement language and phonological and alliterative accentuation for reinforcement. In addition, alliterative words add to the floating of words in recitation, especially in keeping with the oral tradition.

Shakespeare's tragedies are great examples in repetition and balance. The searing inner moral struggles often drive the protagonist to diseased delirium. The spewing of evil or brutality and the acts of folly or purity may spread like a deadly disease causing or inviting catastrophic destruction. *Macbeth* provides a clear model of the artistic and dramatic effectiveness of Shakespeare's use of repetition. The following words are uttered by Macbeth after his murder of King Duncan:

Methought I heard a voice cry '*Sleep* no more! Macbeth does murder
sleep; the innocent *sleep*, *Sleep* that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The *death* of each day's life, sore labour's *bath*, *Balm* of hurt minds, great
Nature's second *course*, Chief *nourisher* in life's feast.

[*Macbeth*, II. ii, 35-39]

The structure of this passage runs like 'sleep' as S and 'sleep' as O + Adj 'sleep' + 'sleep' N Clause + Appositives. The very notion of sleep, a prevalent subject matter for writing in the 16th century, becomes a powerful motif in this play. Cowardly, remorseful, and hysterical, Macbeth conjures up a cloud of hallucinations with a string of imagery. The root cause for emphasizing this word can be traced back to the murder of Duncan: He is killed in his sleep. Macbeth even admires Duncan because he has gained everlasting peace.

Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep

In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly; better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

[*Macbeth*, III. ii, 17-21]

Macbeth asks the Doctor to cleanse Lady Macbeth's brain of the morbid debris stuffing her head so that she may be cured of somnambulism.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weight upon the heart?

[*Macbeth*, V. iii, 40-44]

The causes of insomnia are 'a mind diseased,' 'a rooted sorrow,' 'the written troubles of the brain,' and 'the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff.' The 'sweet oblivious antidote(s)' are 'sore labour's bath,' 'balm of hurt minds,' 'great Nature's second course,' and 'chief nourisher in life's feast.'

King Lear is a good example of perfect parallelism of two plots. Two old men are maltreated by their own children. Gloucester suffers from physical torment, and Lear from mental torture. Each mistrusts or misjudges his children, and each is driven out, and each supported by the abandoned child. Lear is fooled by sweet words, and Gloucester by a letter. Gloucester sees clearly after he is struck blind.

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;

I stumbed when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us, and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. Ah! dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath;
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again.

[*King Lear*, IV. i, 19-24]

Lear has become a shadow of himself. He has become very empty, he has lost his identity, and he is not Lear himself any more:

Does any here know me? This is not Lear:
Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied. Ha! waking? 'tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?

Fool Lear's shadow.

[I. iv, 220-25]

The characters are sharply contrasted as black and white divisions. Goneril, Regan, and Edmond are embodiments of evil. The good people are the Fool, Edgar, and Cordelia. They represent the Christian values of good moral behavior--pity, charity, sacrifice, forgiveness. Cordelia is the 'Most choice, forsaken; most loved, despised' (I. i. 253). Like Lear's 'shadow,' her fate can be wrapped up in one word 'Nothing.' When Lear asks her, 'What can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.' :

Cordella Nothing, my lord.
Lear Nothing?
Cordella Nothing.

Lear Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.
Cordella Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
 According to my bond; nor more nor less.

[I. I, 87-93]

Lear takes it to mean: blankness, loss of filial piety, the vanishment of identity. Finally, Cordelia reiterates her answer by saying 'according to my bond.' The phrase is no more than the equivalent of 'nothing.' Actually the word echoes darkly throughout the play. The meaningless world is implied in Gloucester's rejoinder to Lear, 'O ruined piece of nature! This great world / Shall we wear out to nought (IV. v. 133-4). At the end of *Samson Agonistes*, Milton echoes the same grim view: 'Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail / Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,' (ll. 1721-2. Ed. M. Y. Hughes)

The word 'nothing' is closely linked to the word 'never' crashing down on us in Lear's last speech:

And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more.
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips.
Look there, look there!

[V. iii, 305-11]

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is a chivalric epic full of knights, damsels, dragons, witches, magicians, giants, etc. Book I is a perfect structure of parallels and contrasts.

A. The Redcrosse Knight in Book I is the knight of Holiness.

The other heroes are Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy in Books 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

- B. Redcrosse's pride contrasts with his salvation.
- C. His mistaken view of himself parallels his faith in God.
- D. Una contrasts with Duessa. The former takes him on the right track, and the latter leads him astray.
- E. The Seven Holy Beadsmen counterbalance the seven Deadly Sins.
- F. Redcrosse transcends from immaturity to maturity.
- G. Arthur reunites Redcrosse and Una as Archimago separates them apart.
- H. Lucifer's six counselors ride seven different animals and suffer from seven different diseases.
- I. Each book features one virtue represented by one central character. Prince Arthur represents all the virtues and makes appearance in each book. The number of his appearance corresponds to that of the Book, with the exception of Book III.

Repetition and contrast are most powerful in oratorical speeches. President Kennedy's 'Inaugural Address' drives home his political appeals with the reinforcement of repetition and balance. The parallel and antithetical features can be analyzed as follows:

Antimetabole

'Let us never *negotiate* out of *fear*, but let us never *fear* to *negotiate*.'

Chiasmus

'Ask *not what your country* can do for you, *but what you* can do for your *country*.'

Epanalepsis

'*Mankind* must put an end to *war*, or *war* will put an end to *mankind*.'

Paradoxical Repetition

'*Only when our arms are sufficient* beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that *they will never be employed*!'

Parallel and Balance

'*United*, there is little we *cannot* do... . '*Divided*, there is little we *can* do.'

Extended Repetition

'Together let us *explore* the stars, *conquer* the deserts, *eradicate* disease, *tap* the ocean depths, and *encourage* the arts and commerce.'

[my italics]

Repetition can capture multi-level meanings in a signifying chain touching the most intimate recesses of psychoanalysis related to the Freudian theory of 'repetition automatism.' A supreme example is Lacan's analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'⁵, which can be sketched schematically in four steps:

1. The Minister is discussing something with the Queen in her chamber. Suddenly the King appears. The Minister sees that the Queen looks uneasy. He replaces the Queen's letter with a letter of similar appearance.
2. The Queen discovers the theft, and she asks the Police Chief to retrieve it, but he finds nothing after a thorough searching.
3. The Queen asks for the help of Dupin, a detective. He concludes that the letter is still in the house, but not hidden. He sees the letter carelessly thrown among other mails.
4. Dupin replaces it with a fake letter. He returns the letter to the Queen. Dupin's fake letter contains a message saying it's his revenge for the Minister's deceitfulness in an earlier love affair.

On the basis of Lacan's analysis, we can draw the following inferences:

1. The episodes conform to Freud's 'repetition automatism' expounded in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*⁶. The basic idea is that an object is lost, and then recovered. In Lacanian theory, the mother's body is the lost paradise, and an infant tries very hard to find substitutes for it. The loss causes pain, but it also stimulates our desire for further attachments. Something lost and regained is the basic idea of probing deeply into motifs, characters and

events in a narrative. In this episode, the letter is lost and regained.

2. Lacan concludes the movements of the subjects concerned are effected by the position of the letter, the 'itinerary of a signifier'. We only see the letter, the signifier, but not the signified, the contents of the letter. Eagleton analyzes:

The unconscious is just a continual movement and activity of signifiers, whose signifieds are often inaccessible to us because they are *repressed*. This is why Lacan speaks of the unconscious as a 'sliding of the signified beneath the signifier,' as a constant fading and evaporation of meaning.

[Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 168-69.]

3. According to Lacan, the episode consists of three kinds of 'glance'. The King's and the Police Chief's glances see nothing. The Queen sees the King's 'blank' glance and the Minister sees the police Chief's glance. They feel that the letter and the secret are safe. Then the Minister sees the Queen's glance and Dupin, the detective, sees the Minister's glance, the letter is purloined (substituted or 'diverted from its path') and the 'hidden' letter exposed. Then the letter acts like a signifier influencing the moods and movements of the characters involved in the episode.
4. Psychoanalysis uses repetition and substitution. The patient's suppressed or inhibited feelings or memories are retrieved, repeated, and verbalized. The painful experiences or emotional trauma are substituted in the consciousness for the sub-conscious concealed in the mind. In this episode, repetition and substitution are used by both the Minister and Dupin in the theft and replacement of the letter.
5. Linguistically, we can always know the signifier, the letter, but the contents of the letter, the signified, always remain hidden.

The episodes in Poe's 'The Purloined Letter,' involving glances, characters,

positions, movements, moments, mentalities, or moods, are a great example not only in Lacan's Freudianism and semantics but also in the rhetorical arts of repetition and balance.

Repetition and balance are very common rhetorical devices, but craftsmanship sophistication and effective salience are quite unusual and significant in enhancing the density or intensity of the language. Repetitions of sounds and words are frequently used to show thematic motifs, descriptive vividness, aesthetic designs, onomatopoeic sounds, or supernatural mysteriousness. A good example is provided by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.'

The alliterative voiceless fricatives simulating the stillness of the water, the swiftness of the boat, the spreading of the ripples, the mystery of the reed bushes, or the radiance of the moonshine. (The following letters or words are my italics.)

The *fair breeze blew*, the white *foam flew*.

The *furrow followed free*. [ll. 103-4]

Swiftly, *swiftly flew* the *ship*,

Yet *she sailed softly* too:

Sweetly, *sweetly blew* the *breeze--*

On me alone it *blew*. [ll. 460-4]

The rock *shone bright*, the kirk no less.

That *stands above* the rock

The *moonlight steeped* in silentness

The *steady weathercock*. [ll. 476-9]

The back round vocalic diphthong /ɔɔX/ is used to mimick the sounds of thundering and crashing, and the intensity of the sonorant sound does have the onomatopoeic effect.

The ice was here, the ice was there,

The ice was all around
It cracked and growled and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound! [ll. 59-62]

The ending echoes the beginning in landscape descriptive vividness. The vowel sounds emits a feeling of mysterious stillness.

The harbor bay was *as* clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon. [ll. 472-5]

Many stanzas begin with double words to produce sound and meaning cohesive reinforcement.

Higher and higher every day. [l. 29]
Day after day, day after day. [l. 114]
Water, water, everywhere. [l. 119]
About, about, in reel and rout [l. 127]
A speck *a* mist, *a* shape, I wist! [l. 153]
See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more! [l. 167]
Alone, alone, all, all *alone,* [l. 232]
Around, around, flew each sweet sound, [l. 354]
Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship, [l. 460]
'O *shrieve me, shrieve me,* holy man! [l. 574]
Farewell, farewell! But this I tell [l. 610]

In the paper, I have examined great literature from Old English *Beowulf*, Middle English *Piers Plowman*, Shakespeare's tragedies, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Romantic Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' the contemporary great oratorical speech by John F.

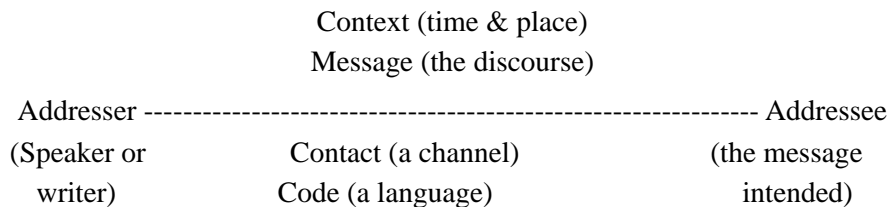
Kennedy, and Lacan's psychoanalytic study of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'. In *Beowulf*, synonymous equivalents are given for putting an object in the spotlight so that it can be focused on or viewed from different angles. In *Piers Plowman*, the alliterative devices are used for its satirical poignancy against the church corruptions and also for conforming to the outburst of alliterative verse called Alliterative Revival in Middle English Literature. In *Macbeth*, the repetition of 'sleep' involves the sub-consciousness of the hysterical and neurotic murderer Macbeth. In *King Lear*, parallelism dominates the whole play: the two plots, the fates of King Lear and Gloucester, the contrasts between good and evil characters. In *The Faerie Queene*, the structure of the entire Book I is based on parallel and balance between virtues and vices. In Kennedy's 'Inaugural Address,' almost all the modes of rhetorical repetition devices or balancing juxtapositions are used. In Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' mysterious stillness and landscape beauty are conveyed through mimetic sound patterns. Finally, Lacan's analysis concerning 'glance,' 'character,' 'moment' repetitions and movements involves Freudian study of repetition and substitution as well as the fading and evaporation of meaning, the interactions between the signifiers and signifieds. Repetition and balance show the symmetry and unsymmetry, foregrounding or regularity, contrast or parallel, antithesis or reversal, manipulations and choices as salient style markers of anesthetic craftsmanship.

Notes

- ¹ In *Style in Language* (1960), Roman Jakobson, founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle, formulated a theoretical framework for the interaction of discourse. The discourse situation involves an addresser (speaker/writer, discourser) and an

addressee, a context (a referent), the message, a contact (a channel and a connection), and a code (a language).

The elements of discourse are in balance as they are shown in the diagram devised by Roman Jakobson:



- ² Geoffrey Leech, in analyzing Dylan Thomas 'This bread I Break,' points out three important features in balance and parallelism: Cohesion, Foregrounding, and Cohesion of Foregrounding. Cohesion forms 'a network of sequential relations': 'The semantic opposition between immediacy ('thisness') and non-immediacy (thatness) of temporal and spatial reference'. He means the distributional patterns of the present and the past tense. In Foregrounding, abnormality against the norms of the background language, he says even uniformity or parallelism can become foregrounded. In Cohesion of Foregrounding, Dylan Thomas set up a series of semantically analogous equivalences like 'This bread . . . This wine' Further extended foregrounding is the phonemic congruity of wind, wine, vine, veins. In other words, Thomas chooses a lot of alliterative monosyllabic words as striking patterns of foregrounding cohesion. (pp. 119-28, In Freeman)
- ³ Jan Mukarovsky distinguishes the aesthetic freshness of poetic language and the hackneyed norm of the standard language. In his 'Standard Language And Poetic Language,' he says, 'The function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become.' (p. 43. In Freeman) He means that poetic language must deviate from the norm of the standard as far away as possible. Thus, distortion cannot be executed unless the poet puts in his maximal effects.

4. The best sources for the examples of those terms can be found in Northrop Frye's *The Harper Handbook To Literature* and Katie Wales' *A Dictionary of Stylistics*.
5. According to Lacan, it is misleading to translate 'purloined' as 'stolen'. "The title indicates that the letter has been diverted from its path; its cause prolonged, its delivery held up." For details, see Michael Payne's *Reading Theory* (p7). For in-depth analysis, see Jerry Aline Flieger's 'The Purloined Pun Punchline: Joke as Textual paradigm,' and N. N. Holland's 'Re-covering 'The Purloined Letter': Reading as a Personal Transaction."
6. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud interpreted the fort-da game [fort (gone away), da (here)] as an object is lost, and then recovered. According to Terry Eagleton:

In Lacanian theory, it is an original lost object--the mother's body--which drives forward the narrative of our lives, impelling us to pursue substitutes for this lost paradise in the endless metonymic movement of desire. For Freud, it is a desire to scramble back to a place where we cannot be harmed, the inorganic existence which precedes all conscious life, which keeps us struggling forward: our restless attachments (Eros) are in thrall to the death drive (Thanatos). Something must be lost or absent in any narrative for it to unfold: if everything stayed in place there would be no story to tell. This loss is distressing, but exciting as well: desire is stimulated by what we cannot quite possess, and this is one source of narrative satisfaction.

[Terry Eagleton, pp.185-86]

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